



## Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact [support@jstor.org](mailto:support@jstor.org).

## NIETZSCHE AND THE ARISTOCRATIC IDEAL.

A. K. ROGERS.

THAT the quality of human life, and not its mere being, or its quantity, is ethically fundamental, is the undoubted truth lying back of the part which the ideal of aristocracy has played in human development. It is from this demand that life be lived in terms of its aristocratic values that Nietzsche takes his start; and the essence of such a super-quality of life is what he seeks to embody in his phrase "the will to power." Before, however, yielding to the glamor of a formula, one needs to determine very carefully in what precisely, in terms of concrete value, it is meant to issue. Now the will to power might naturally, perhaps, suggest an ideal in which positive fulness of life and abundance of worthy content is to be the dominating note. But its most characteristic feature after all, when Nietzsche comes actually to fill in the outlines, turns out easier to put in negative than in positive terms. As to what concretely constitutes the positive form of the good life, Nietzsche is, indeed, tolerably vague. Whatever his good intentions in the matter, the will to power becomes primarily in his hands not a fact of worthy accomplishment, but an extremely self-conscious protest against a certain abstract human attitude—the disposition to let up in our strenuousness, take our ease, be content with the aims of average humanity. This explains the strong dash of asceticism in his ideal, in spite of its attempt at an emphasis on life; it ministers to man's sense of power that he should practice "cruelty" on himself, and so feel his will tense and strong. Hence, too, the omnipresent demand that life should be a continual state of warfare—of combat. Nietzsche is filled with an almost pathological sense of the facts of evil, cruelty, pain and suffering, which envelop human existence. His master, Schopenhauer, had on the same foundation erected a system of pessimism, and had held

that to escape the pervasive evil of existence man should renounce the will to live. Nietzsche came to think that evil offered, rather, a positive content to life. Instead of trying to escape evil and gain happiness, the whole significance of life lies in the sense of power which the need for fighting hostile forces calls into being. Evil is thus not really evil; it is necessary for man's real end, and so a good. The true man lusts for conflict, for danger, for pain even, to assure the exaltation of his mood.

It is in this rather narrow sense, first of all, then, that we are to take Nietzsche's demand for "quality" of life; quality is definable as that consciousness of sheer virility and strenuousness, that aristocratic indifference to the common motives of love of ease or fear of danger, that profound respect for one's own superior excellence leading one never to intermit his effort, which, in his pages, always looms very much larger than the actual achievements of objective good that power may effect. Since the one good, the only thing really to be admired, is, indeed, power itself, the particular form it assumes is a matter of indifference, and the need for an objective description of the good life logically, therefore, tends to drop away. In the light of this large emphasis, Nietzsche's doctrines in detail are to be understood. Thus his repudiation of Christianity and the "social" virtues,—a morality of "the coward, the sneak, timid and modest, counselling peace of soul and end of hatred, love toward friend and foe." This is nothing but a herding animal morality, a sacrifice of quality to numbers, which is the denial of all grand values. "So arises necessarily the sand of humanity, all very like one another, very small, very round, very peaceable, very tiresome." It is evident there can issue from this nothing but contempt for the ruck of mankind, deficient as they are in that element which alone calls forth our admiring regard; and therewith, too, the fate of excellence becomes identified straightway and necessarily with the existence of an aristocratic class, and the consciousness of the good with the persuasion of superior force and breeding.

The doubt I have to raise about such an ideal is, in general, its self-defeating character. To identify, to begin with, the fate of human distinction and dignity with the pretensions of individuals or a class is at once to cheapen the whole enterprise. Immediately it begins to call forth the infinite capacities of self-delusion and conceit in human nature, and to turn away men's eyes from the true and objective standards of human good. No aristocracy ever did or ever could live up to the flattering portrait it draws of itself. It is under the romantic illusion; and to see things as they are would generate a humility fatal to aristocratic claims. From the standpoint of intellectual realism, therefore, the typical aristocratic temper implies a defect. A sense of superiority is sure to be the sign of a certain blindness, a lack of imagination and insight which is aesthetically disagreeable. The more thoroughly a man comes in contact sympathetically with his fellows, and the more completely he knows them, the more highly will he commonly be found to estimate the worth of the stuff that is in them. When this is questioned, I believe that the denial almost always will come from those whose dealings with men, though widely extended perhaps, have been of a narrow and official sort—who are interested in them only as laboring machines, or learners of lessons, or disciplined fighting animals, or in some other specialized capacity. In view of a great mass of testimony, the agnosticism of the aristocrat with reference to possibilities existing in the common run of men may be set down not to a superior intellectual grasp, but rather to an arrogant claim to finality which is intellectually unbecoming. This whole tendency to deal in large assertions which lump individuals by types and generalizations is a mark of an intellectual lack of precision. Any one with a sense for reality will have felt this limitation at least on the imaginative side, when he has been brought into contact with caste feeling. The blindness of masters and mistresses to the human quality of a servant class, except as this fits into conventional duties of service,—a blindness revenged in a way by the shrewd criticism from

the other side,—of men of superior races who suppose their slashing generalizations adequate to the infinite complexity of the peoples they despise, the self-sufficiency and calm assurance with which the aristocrat tends to leave out of the world to be reckoned with the tradesman and mechanic, should be recognized for what it is—mere obtuseness and dogmatism of mind, which deserves the condemnation that belongs to any willingness to be content with specious formulas.

And the same limitation comes to light in the other direction—the aristocrat's overestimate of his own worth. The universal odium that snobbishness calls forth rests on a true perception that no man is enough bigger or better than his fellows to justify him in pointing with pride to his own excellencies. When such a conceit fills his mind, he is bound to have a false standard of comparison which vitiates his judgment and hampers his performance. One has only to note the ease with which in a military caste the aristocratic pretensions of the officer pass into snobbery, and snobbery into inefficiency and dry rot. The claims of the "superior man" are in any case very easy to exaggerate. We habitually overestimate the wisdom of the wise, as we usually discover when we come into more immediate contact with them. The source of strength in aristocracies has commonly resided less in individual superiority than in greater cohesive power—itself a consequence not of intelligent foresight but of self-interest; in whatever way cohesion is secured, the same political superiority shows, as in the modern political machine. As an ideal adopted spontaneously by a lower class through the recognition of qualities in which it is itself deficient, aristocracy has its good points; though a lack of respect for unadorned fact, and a fondness for the more showy and specious aspects of the good, render it always a romantic ideal, with the shortcomings of romanticism. So true aristocratic virtues, molded by contact with reality, and before they become self-conscious through the need of being forced to defend themselves against "inferiors," are undoubted contributions to the

life of man, whose aberrations even may claim a degree of indulgence; as the genius may possibly be forgiven acts such as would condemn a lesser man. But when he starts in to argue for his own immunity on the ground that he *is* a genius, it is time for his immunity to cease. It is not well for a man to indulge his sense of being an exception to the human race, with special rights and a special destiny. Aristocracy as itself an aristocratic *ideal* has already lost its pungency and truth, and become little more than a conceit of past achievement. An aristocrat proudly conscious of his own superiority, is one of the least edifying of human spectacles.

Now while Nietzsche of course aims to escape the defects of historical aristocracies, it remains true that by his intellectual emphasis he is pointed straight toward them. Once begin to substitute a feeling of the superiority of one's own qualities for a disinterested concern with objective good, and the whole content of the good evaporates. True distinction consists in the ability to see the worth of objective values, and to identify one's personal fortunes with their achievement. But Nietzsche really denies all values save one alone. There is nothing in itself good or bad; an end becomes good only as it calls forth in man the sense of strength and power. But this leaves as the one thing worth going after the exercise of power itself, irrespective of the worth of the results through which our normal valuation justifies power in the end. Firmness of will, aggressiveness, self-control, "hardness," in the last resort get their established character as virtues from the service they perform, and cannot safely set up in business on their own account. The purpose of the Englishman's tub is cleanliness, not the cultivation of a sense of how admirable is the habit; and when one begins to take pride in never omitting his bath, he is on the road to spiritual destruction.

This appears strikingly, once more, in Nietzsche's doctrine of evil. That evil, pain, suffering, may elicit man's powers of combat and resistance, and so prove capable of

being transmuted into good, and that without them, indeed, he would fail to reach his true stature, is an insight valuable, though scarcely novel. But when Nietzsche goes on to deduce from this that we are, therefore, not to try to abolish evil, but to keep it in existence rather, and even augment it, that we may have so much more material to try the soul's strength on, he is going contrary to the whole moral instinct. The moment evil ceases for us to be really bad, and only a means to good carefully to be conserved, the sole motive that remains for fighting it is that of romantic self-glorification; the significant value of the crusade against evil lapses. For the moral man, evil is not something intrinsically indifferent, which gets a worth through conditioning the exercise of power; power itself becomes a genuinely defensible good only because it is enlisted in the task of securing ends good and admirable in themselves, and of abolishing things bad and hateful. Nietzsche does not deny that the good is also good. But it is, again, good only in the same way that evil is—as it supplies a bone for aggressive strength to gnaw upon. “Love gives the highest feeling of power”—such a justification is precisely the “selfish” theory of Hobbes, disguised in literary language.

The same tendency to overlook the true locus of the good appears in another form when Nietzsche makes of the man who most fully embodies power the end with reference to which all other men are to be utilized as a means. Quite logically, the superman must himself recognize his superiority, and calmly sacrifice the weak to his own enlargement. Now this clearly revolts our disinterested moral feeling. If a superman in a wreck were to save his own important life at the expense of helpless women, we should at once feel that his estimate of his worth needed drastic revision. A spectator may always be permitted a feeling of regret when the more valuable life is sacrificed to the less. But for a man deliberately to adopt this estimate of *himself*, and act upon it, apart from the claims of some special duty to which he may be committed, disgusts us. If,

indeed, the good were nothing but the will to power itself, perhaps a good and vital specimen of the race ought to be kept in existence at any cost. But if we think other values also needful to an ideal that can retain our allegiance, too high a sense of one's own necessity in the world might very well jeopardize this larger good. And throughout in Nietzsche the natural megalomania of the aristocrat keeps intruding, to moderate our appreciation of his merits. We catch continually the note of a proud disdain and self-sufficiency which marks a failure in intellectual realism. These new Lords of the earth are to replace God, taking all the affairs of man into their strong and capable hands, and winning the deep and unconditional trust of the ruled; renouncing happiness for themselves, they have an eye to the whole range of social need, redeeming the miserable by the doctrine of "speedy death," and favoring religions and systems of ideas according to their suitability to this or that grade of intelligence. We may perhaps, though at some considerable risk, hold this vision of an omnipotent will and an infallible wisdom before us to admire; but we may not hope to see it realized in human form. There is no such animal; and the man who thinks himself fitted to condescend to the universe, and play an earthly Providence, is simply revealing his own limitations. Nietzsche in person is not free from the defect; and when we find him talking of himself as powerful enough to "break the history of humanity into two parts," and anticipating as an effect of the appearance of his book that "in two years we shall have the whole earth in convulsions," the shock to our sense of proportion is itself a valid criticism of his ideal.

I have assumed hitherto that for Nietzsche the superman, as a concrete embodiment of power, is a final end, justified in exploiting lesser humanity in the interest of his own admirable qualities. But now there is another standpoint combined with this in Nietzsche which suggests a different mode of approach. Often, perhaps most often, Nietzsche is concerned to recommend the aristocratic ideal as an ideal, rather, of present imperfect humanity, led on

to aim at the creation of a human type as yet unrealized. It becomes an ideal of the future, to which we are called to sacrifice ourselves, and in the attainment of which the existing world and all preceding generations were well lost.

The setting up of the human race and its advancement as a goal for present and unideal human beings has, indeed, an objectivity which the ideal of the superman, looking to himself as an end, and subordinating the universe to the exercise of his talents, fails to offer. To sacrifice oneself for the "welfare of the race" is one of those phrases that sound well, and that have enough of truth in them not to be discarded outright. But in so far as it really means what it says, it combines the difficulties of the ordinary philosophy of self-sacrifice with others peculiar to itself. That we should refrain from doing what plainly is going to put the next generation at a disadvantage, and should try to build so solidly that the benefits we enjoy may hold over into the future, we might well keep in mind much more firmly than we do. But that we ought to subordinate the interests of the present generation to later ages, and have their welfare at heart in preference to our own, that we should "set ourselves to bring beings into existence who shall stand elevated above the whole species, and to sacrifice ourselves and our neighbors to this end," means surprisingly little when we get down to plain facts. If we cannot truly bring the good of life to others, even our own contemporaries, but have to leave them largely to their own devices, how can we work, save incidentally and in a very general way, for people yet unborn? And are we sure they would thank us if we were there to hear their opinion? Any effort to anticipate the future, apart from the immediate steps ahead, leads us into the field of guesswork and utopias, and removes the essential conditions of successful experiment. But besides being impracticable, the ideal lends itself to the cultivation in the present race also of a state of mind of questionable merit; and this brings us back to the defects of aristocracy again. It is almost inevitable that, with such a goal before us, our condemnation of un-

worthy qualities will begin to turn into a disdain of those who, as we think, show these qualities, and the preference for the noble over the ignoble into a separation of mankind into the sheep and the goats; and then we are laying ourselves open to the same criticism as before. Not only are conceit and snobbishness sure to be engendered in us, but this means that from the ideal itself there has to be left out the side of democratic sympathy, which nevertheless has, equally with virility, a claim to a position among the "higher" qualities. And the more thoroughgoing our attitude, the more we push ahead the attainment of the goal into the distant future and look to see a new species take the place of present man, the more we are bound in logic to despise man as we know him, and his present life; and the more, therefore, our sense of the value of life, and the possibilities in man, turns to pessimism and practical defeat.

A. K. ROGERS.

YALE UNIVERSITY.